

NOTE OF A MEETING WITH THE IRISH LANGUAGE GROUP, STORMONT CASTLE,  
28 APRIL 1989

PRESENT:

Dr Mawhinney  
Mr Spence  
Mr McCusker  
Miss Ernshaw

Dr M Hayes  
Dr J Hawthorne  
Mr C Napier  
Professor G Stockman  
Dr I Adamson  
Dr R Blaney  
Mr P Loughrey  
Dr M Crozier



1. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the proposal submitted by the Group to establish a new Trust to encourage and support the Irish Language.
2. Dr Mawhinney welcomed the Group and thanked them for their interest and enthusiasm in developing the proposal. Dr Hayes began by congratulating the Minister for his decision on Irish in the school curriculum. It was, he felt, sensitively handled and was widely welcomed by those with a genuine interest in the promotion of Irish language.
3. Dr Hayes said that the purpose of the Group was to find a way in which interest in the Irish language could be encouraged across the whole community and supported. They believed that the language had been hijacked by the zealots and their aim was to reclaim it as something which the whole community could share. In promoting a pluralist society there was a need for recognition and focus for the Irish language.
4. Mr Napier endorsed these points and Dr Adamson spoke of his efforts with Farset Youth and Community Development Company to interest young protestant people in a shared heritage and to demonstrate that the language was not the exclusive property of one side; in effect to take the chill factor away from the Irish language.
5. Dr Mawhinney said he was aware of the sensitivities involved and referred to recent and forthcoming decisions which signalled new approaches on a range of issues in the whole area of community relations and cultural traditions. The aim would be to stress commonality and that diversity could be a cement rather than a division. The Government was broadly supportive of the substance of the proposal but he had to consider what the appropriate mechanism should be. Was a Trust the best way forward or could provision for the Irish language be

accommodated within existing or planned structures? There was a danger of too many new groups emerging. A new body could be seen as government seeking to keep the language issue at arms length and subsequently being criticised for doing so. He accepted that, on the other hand, direct drive by Government might not find great favour.

6. In discussion it was accepted that there had to be an explicit link to Government, though it was agreed that a specific statutory body or quango was not the way forward. However the members of the Group clearly favoured a distinctive body emerging; other wise the language would be submerged within the philosophy and priorities of bodies with wider remits, and there would not be adequate representation of those active and prominent in the promotion of the Irish language. There was also the need for the body to operate somewhere below high academic levels and reach out into all communities. Dr Mawhinney expressed the view that in any structure he would wish to see representation from those who were active at grass roots level.
7. Dr Mawhinney concluded the meeting by thanking the Group for their work and said he would have to consider very carefully the points they had raised. He suggested that one way forward might be the appointment of a committee which could, within a few months, make recommendations about the most appropriate framework and the principles on which it might be based. He said he would advise the Group of his decision as soon as possible.
8. Mr Napier expressed the thanks of the Group for the meeting which he felt in itself was a major step forward. He also said that the vast majority of those involved in the Irish language would dissociate themselves completely from the totally unwarranted verbal attacks on Dr Mawhinney about the Irish language and welcomed his sensitivity on the issues involved.
9. After the meeting, the Minister spoke to Dr Hawthorne and Mr Spence and asked them to work up for his consideration a paper which might take this

matter forward along the lines he had indicated at para 7 above.

*T McCusker*

T McCUSKER

CCRU

2 May 1989

cc PS/SOS (L&B)  
PS/Sir Kenneth Bloomfield  
Mr Semple  
Mr Parkes  
Mr Burns  
Mr Miles  
Mr Thomas  
Mr Spence  
Mr Blackwell  
Mr Kirk  
Mr Masfield  
Mr J McConnell

CU/TMcC/5/1